THE FIFTH DAY.

9th January 1907.

The Assembly met again at 12 noon on Wednesday the 9th January 1907.

166. Free and compulsory primary education.

Mr. K. G. Sesha Iyer, B. A., B. L., (Central Association, Trivandrum) said that the subject was one of supreme importance and his rooted belief was that a Government that had been uniformly liberal in their views and actions in this department of public policy would bestow sympathetic consideration on any reasonable suggestions made by the people to secure to them the fullest benefit of their enlightened policy. At the last session of the Assembly he had moved that primary education should be made free and compulsory in the State and presented the subject from the academical standpoint of national efficiency. At the risk of repetition, he now ventured to submit that in all departments of public policy it should be the prime

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object of the State to promote and facilitate the attainment of national efficiency in all possible ways. Trained intelligence was at the basis of national fitness. To-day, no State could risk being a single step behind in the general education of its citizens, if it desired to make them really efficient for the coming battle of life. Writers on political science, both European and American, were agreed in regarding education as a constituent function of the modern State, and it must be admitted that too much thought and attention could not be lavished, nor too much expenditure incurred on the proper and efficient education of the people. Every facility should be given for equipping each and every citizen with the necessary trained intelligence for the various functions of national life, and, the member thought, that the organization of the primary stages of the training of the national intelligence for national ends was pre-eminently a national affair which should be controlled absolutely by the State. Last year, Government were pleased to state that already disproportionately large attention had been paid to and much expenditure incurred on education and that there were other matters that had a claim upon the State funds even more urgently than questions connected with public instruction. No doubt, the expenditure incurred by the State on education amounting to 5 lacs of rupees was, it had to be gratefully acknowledged, greater than the expenditure incurred elsewhere in India, but that it was not disproportionately high would be obvious if a comparison were instituted between that sum and the expenditure incurred on this account in some of the progressive States of Europe and in some of the colonies. The instance of Switzerland was in point. He was not advocating any impossible ideal in asking Government to make primary education free and compulsory; for, it had been long ago demonstrated in other countries and was being now demonstrated in India as being within the range of practical politics. He then dwelt on the different systems of primary education obtaining in the continental countries of Europe, in England, and in the United States of America. To come nearer home, he said that primary education had been made both free and compulsory in Baroda and in another Native State. The Government of India had already invited the opinions of local Governments about making primary education free. It was thus patent that the supreme importance of the subject had become recognised all over India and that in certain progressive Native States free and compulsory

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primary education had become a settled fact. Government had already said that one of their objects in raising the school fees was to make more money available for purposes of primary education. This was another reason why they should see their way to make primary education free, but instead, the people had learned with regret that in the fee-notification the fees for the primary department were still retained. Last year's address shewed that the number of pupils in primary schools in 1080 was 1,80,340 against 1,83,328 in 1079. The fall in the number of pupils was regrettable, and if it continued, the necessity for enforcing primary education and rendering it gratuitous became even more imperious. Taking the larger of those two figures as representing the average number of pupils in primary schools in any year and on the hypothesis that all those pupils attended Government Primary schools—which was by no means the case, for the large majority of them attended schools under private management—the gross income from the primary department would not exceed two or three thousand rupees, and certainly this amount ought not to be felt as any appreciable difference in the income of the State when such large issues were involved. The boon that Government would be conferring upon the people by making primary education free and compulsory was invaluable and the possible loss that Government might sustain by declaring primary education free would be very small indeed. Already, the members thankfully acknowledged that primary education was free in respect of backward classes and of girls, and he prayed earnestly that Government might be pleased to make it free for all people and to enforce it throughout the State.

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Mr. R. Narayana Pillai (*Ettumanur*), *Mr. Kumara Menon* (*T. I. C., Kottayam*), *Mr. Kesavan Padmanabhan* (*Mavelikara*) *and Mr. S. Krishna Pillai* (*Tiruvalla*) also spoke on the subject.

Reply.—The subject is no doubt an important one. As stated in reply to subject No. 164, free primary education is already provided for wherever practicable and no further extension of it or reduction of fees seems possible now. As regards compulsory education, Government are of opinion that the time is not yet ripe for it. We shall wait and see what is being done elsewhere and, besides hoping for the improvement in the finances of the State, watch the growing sentiments of the people. It may be then time to consider if any action